Identification of problems faced by the rural women in receiving services provided by the BRAC on food and nutrition: A case of rural Bangladesh

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ABSTRACT

Both GOs and NGOs have been conducting different program for rural women whereas food and nutrition improvement program is one of them in Bangladesh. While, rural women receiving information on food and nutrition through training, group discussion etc. In connection to this issue, this study mainly undertaken to determine the extent of problems faced by the rural women in receiving services provided by the BRAC on food and nutrition while the relationship between the selected characteristics of rural women and

their problems faced in receiving services on food and nutrition was also explored. A structured interview schedule was used for collection of relevant data from the women engaged in nutritional program during 10 to 31 October, 2017. The study was conducted in three selected villages under Trishal Sub-district in Mymensingh District, Bangladesh and 100 rural women those have been receiving services from BRAC (NGO) was interviewed using structured questionnaire. Problem faced by the rural women was the dependent variable while the extent of problems was determined by using a 4 point rating scale. Appropriate scale and scores were used to measure the independent variables. Both descriptive and inferential analysis was used to analyze and interpret the collected data. The findings indicates that the highest proportion (72 percent) of the respondents in the study area faced high problems, while the rest 28 percent of the respondents faced medium problems in receiving services for nutrition of food and none of the respondents in the study area faced low level of problems. The problem which ranked first was "Non-cooperation of BRAC program's agent" while "Deficiency of knowledge of BRAC agent" was the least important problem among those faced by the rural women in their household food nutrition. Correlation analysis indicates that communication media, knowledge on food and nutrition and extent of need had shown significant relationship with problems faced by the rural women but other variables did not show any significant relationship. The respective authority should take initiatives to overcome those problems to ensure good services for the rural women.

1. INTRODUCTION

In Bangladesh, women constitute about half of the total population of which 70 percent live in rural areas (BBS, 2016). But their status has been ranked the lowest in the world on the basis of twenty indicators related to health, marriage, children, education, employment and social equality. The World Bank study in Bangladesh highlights that women have limited role in household decision-making, limited access and control over household resources (physical and financial assets), low level of individual assets, heavy domestic workloads, restricted mobility and inadequate knowledge and skills lead to women's vulnerability (Sebstad and Cohen 2012).

Rural women play a critical role in agricultural production and in the rural economies of developing countries. In the developing country like Bangladesh, agriculture accounted for about 55 per cent of total female employment and it is still the most important sector for female employment in sub-Saharan Africa and Asia. Rural women make major and multiple contributions to the achievement of food security and produce more than half of the food grown worldwide. Women diversify and perform multiple tasks simultaneously to sustain their livelihoods, working on farms and engaging in off-farm activities, as well as continuing their critical role in terms of reproduction. Their responsibilities include the collection of water and fuel, activities that are particularly burdensome in areas with a poor social infrastructure (Olumakaiy and Ajavi, 2009). Land and property ownership increases women's food security, their bargaining power within the household and their social status as members of the community. The spread of agro-industry and rural industrialization has increased the possibilities for women to access cash income through self employment or the setting up of rural enterprises.

Status of women is an important factor affecting the socio-economic development of a country. There is no single indicator to measure the status of women in a society. Purdah (veil) system may act as a major obstacle for rural women to establish their rights (Begum, 2000). Despite the system of purdah, women have to perform jobs such as preparing food for their whole family, collecting firewood and cooking, feeding and rearing up children, feeding poultry birds and cattle, taking care of the cattle and birds, processing agricultural products, washing clothes and gardening in the homestead premises. No doubt, the contribution of women to their families is very significant and is not necessarily less than that of the male members of the family. But their contribution in terms of labour and their roles in agriculture do not receive social recognition.

Women in Bangladesh have been trying to search information on food and nutrition not for their survival. Rather, it is for their family members and they obtain information from different sources like Non-Government Organizations (NGO) activities. BRAC is one of the largest NGOs in Bangladesh which has been conducting several programs for women development. Food and Nutrition improvement program is one of them where women receive information on food and nutrition through training, group discussion etc although some problems still exist there (Roy, 2017).

In the light of above issue, a good numbers of studies have been conducted on the rural women on different issues like food and nutrition, problems faced, Integrated Fish Farming Activities, Farming and Non-Farming Activities, Empowerment, Homestead Fish farming Activities etc. (Afroz, 2014; Alam, 2014 and Owmal, 2017). But Need for Capacity Building of Rural Women Towards Household Food Utilization and Nutritional Awareness was conducted by others (Shuvo, 2017 and Sultana, 2017). Besides, no

available studies found problems related to information on food and nutrition especially for rural women. Thus, there is a gap to study on identification of problems faced by the rural women in receiving information related to food and nutrition. Therefore, this study is taken with the following objectives.

1. To determine and describe the selected characteristics of rural women
2. To determine the extent of problems faced by the rural women in receiving services provided by BRAC on food and nutrition
3. To explore the relationship between the selected characteristics of rural women and their problems faced in receiving services provided by BRAC on food and nutrition.

2. METHODOLOGY

The study was conducted in three villages namely, Dorirampur, Namapara,Vhatipara under Trishal upazila in Mymensing district. Nutritional programs had been conducted in these three villages under BRAC (International Non-Government Organization) and the rural women were used to applying their services on food and nutrition. The women (1002) who have been taking services on food and nutrition from BRAC in the study area were the population of the study. While a list of mentioned population was collected from BRAC office at Mymensing. One hundred women (i.e., 10 percent of the population) were selected as sample of the present study using simple random method. A structured interview schedule was used for collection of relevant data from the women engaged in nutritional program during 10 to 31 October, 2017.

Problem faced by the rural women was the dependent variable while the extent of problems was determined by using a 4 point rating scale such as high, medium, moderate, low and no and score were assigned to represent the same as 3, 2, 1 and 0 respectively. The possible range of problem score could be 0 to 33 where 0 indicated no problems in receiving service from BRAC while a score of 33 indicated highest problem for the same. To ascertain the extent of seriousness of problems, Problem Confrontation Index (PCI) was computed. The Problem Confrontation Index (PCI) score was used to make a rank among the problems faced by the rural women. The Problem confrontation Index (PI) for each of the items was computed by using the following formula:

$$PCI = P_h \times 3 + P_m \times 2 + P_l \times 1 + P_n \times 0$$

Where,
PCI = Problem confrontation Index
P_h = Number of rural women indicating high problem
P_m = Number of rural women indicating moderate problem
P_l = Number of rural women indicating low problem
P_n = Number of rural women indicating no problem at all

As the total number of respondent farmers was 100, the PCI of each item thus could range from zero (0) to 300. Where zero (0) indicated no problem and 300 indicated very high problem by the farmers. However, in order to have comparative sense of different problem items, these items were arranged in rank order according to PCI. Both descriptive and inferential analysis was used to interpret the results.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Selected Characteristics of the Rural Women

Behavior of an individual is determined to a large extent by her characteristics. It was therefore assumed that problems of rural women would be influenced by their various characteristics. The individual characteristics included age, level of education, family size, farm size, family annual income, organizational participation, training received, communication media, decision making ability and cosmopolitanism. These characteristics of the women have been shown in Table 1 and described in this section in more details.

Data presented in the Table 1 shows that a good number of women (63 percent) were of young aged category, and 36 percent of them being middle aged while only 1 percent of respondent belongs to old. Thus, it can be said that all most all women belong to young to middle aged category. Only 41 percent women belongs to literate group, which is lower than national literacy level.Data shows that 31 percent large size families are breaking down in to 44 percent medium, 25 percent small size households. The small and medium sized family women always try to maintain nutritional food On the basis of their farm size, the respondents were classified into five categories following the classification of DAE (2016) i.e. landless (<0.02), marginal (0.021-0.20) and small (0.21-

1.0). The findings indicated that most of the respondents (50 percent) had small household farm size while almost same percentage (49 percent) of the respondents belong to marginal farm size but only 1 percent found landless category. This is a general trend in Bangladesh that farm size of the people is being decreased day by day due to land fragmentation through generation to generation.

Data indicates that women socio-economic condition of rural women is changing towards better condition in study area as 56 percent women belong to medium to high income category. The majority (57 percent) of the women had received low training while rest 33 percent and 10 percent had no training and medium training, respectively. It reveals that the majority of women in the study area were having low training on food and nutrition. That means more training on nutrition is important for minimizing the problems they faced. Data presented in the Table-1 indicate that majority (86 percent) of the respondents had moderate knowledge while 9 percent and 5 percent had low and high knowledge respectively. It was found that 18 percent of the respondents had low extension media contact, while 76 percent had moderate media contact 6 percent of the respondents had high media contact. The findings clearly showed that most of the rural women had moderate media contact which was an indication of inadequate extension service to that community.

Table 1 Salient feature of personal characteristics of the rural women

Characteristics	Scoring system	Range		Respondent Categories	Respondent		Mean	SD*
		Possible	Observed		No.	%		
Age	Years	Unknown	16-60	Young(16-35)	63	63	31.94	9.217
				Middle aged (36-50)	36	36		
				Old (above 50)	1	1		
Level of education	Years of schooling	Unknown	0-16	Illiterate (0)	17	17	3.030	3.869
				Can sign only (0.5)	42	42		
				Primary (1-5)	20	20		
				Secondary (6-10)	16	16		
				Above secondary (above 10)	5	5		
Family size	No. of members	Unknown	3-11	Small (2- 4)	25	25	5.81	1.796
				Medium (5-6)	44	44		
				Large (above-6)	31	31		
Farm Size	Hectares	Unknown	0.02-0.99	Landless (0.02)	1	1	0.2444	0.2055
				Marginal (0.021-0.202)	49	49		
				Small (0.21-1.0)	50	50		
Family annual income	'000' Tk.	Unknown	80.00-900.00	Low (up to 120)	13	13	580	533
				Medium (121-300)	44	44		
				High (above 300)	43	43		
Training received	Days of training	Unknown	0-9	No training (0 day)	33	33	2.11	1.994
				Short (up to 4)	57	57		
				Medium (5-9)	10	10		
Knowledge	Scale score	0-42	9-39	Poor (up to 14)	9	9	23.8	6.901
				Moderate (15-28)	86	86		
				High (29-42)	5	5		
Communication media	Scale score	0-45	9-40	Low (up to15)	18	18	20.73	6.033
				Moderate (16-30)	76	76		
				High (above30)	6	6		
Decision making ability	Scale score	0-36	8-30	Weak (up to12)	7	7	21.07	5.006
				Moderate (13-24))	66	66		
				Strong (above 24)	27	27		
Cosmopolitanism	Scale score	0-18	0-9	No(0)	29	29	2.97	2.508
				Low(1-6)	61	61		

				Medium(7-12)	10	10		
				High(above12)	0	0		
Extent of need	Scale score	0-54	9-39	Low(up to18)	9	9	26.35	6.295
				Medium(19-36)	86	86		
				High(above 36)	5	5		

SD = Standard deviation

On the basis of decision making capacity score, the respondents were classified into three categories- 48 as weak (up to 12), moderate (13-24) and high (above 24) decision making capacity. Result in the Table-1 shows that the highest proportion (7 percent) of the women had strong capacity while 66 percent of them had moderate and the rest 27 percent had weak decision making capacity in the family. The distribution of the respondents regarding decision making capacity in the family was supported by Ahmed (2007) and Rhaman and Begum (2009). The finding indicates, 61 percent had low and 10 percent had medium cosmopolitanism. But, 29 percent respondents belong not to cosmopolitanism. While cosmopolitanism of respondents may influence the orientation of the innovation and thus, this leads to adopt new practice.

Extent of problems faced by the rural women
Problems faced by the rural women in household food nutrition were measured through eleven selected items of problems. The observed score of the problems faced by the rural women in household food nutrition ranged from 12 to 33 against a possible range of 0 to 33. Data presented in Table-2 showed that the mean and standard deviation of this score was 23.28 and 4.72 respectively.

Table 2 Categorization of rural women based on their problems faced in receiving service on food and nutrition

Categories	Respondents		Mean	SD
	Number	Percentage		
low (up to 11)	0	0		
Medium(12-22)	28	28		
High(above 22)	72	72	23.28	4.716
Total	100	100		

Data presented in Table 2 indicated that the highest proportion (72 percent) of the respondents in the study area faced high extent of problem, while the rest 28 percent of the respondents faced medium extent of problem towards nutrition of food and none of the respondents in the study area faced low level of problems. The mean and standard deviation of the scores were small. This means that almost all of the respondents faced similar problems to similar extent. This might be due to the similar socio-economic background of the respondents. Khalak (2016) found almost similar outcomes in his study.

Rank order of the problems faced by the rural women in household food nutrition
The extent of problems faced by the rural women in achieving household food nutrition with their rank order values have been presented in Table 3. Data furnished in the Table 3 indicated that the problem which ranked first was "Non-cooperation of BRAC program agent" followed by second one "Lack of frequent visit by the BRAC agent" and third one "Lack of frequent communication by the BRAC agent". "Deficiency of knowledge of BRAC agent" was the least important problem among those faced by the rural women in their household food nutrition.

Table 3 Rank order of the problem faced by the rural women in household food nutrition

Sl No.	Problems faced by the rural women	Extents of problems				Score	Rank order
		High	Medium	Low	Not at all		
1.	Non-cooperation of BRAC program agent	40	52	4	4	228	1
2.	Lack of frequent visit by the BRAC agent	41	47	6	6	223	2
3.	Lack of frequent communication by	36	52	9	3	221	3

	the BRAC agent						
4.	Unpunctuality of the BRAC agent	38	47	5	10	213	4
5.	Poor follow up of the food and nutritional program at field level made by the BRAC authority	43	35	13	9	212	5
6.	Lack of sufficient knowledge of BRAC agent on food and nutrition	33	52	7	8	210	6
7.	Lack of commitment of the BRAC agent	35	49	6	10	209	7
8.	Poor behaviour of BRAC agent	38	43	8	11	208	8
9.	Lack of educational facilities	34	50	4	12	206	9
10.	Carelessness of the BRAC agent	29	54	6	11	201	10
11.	Deficiency of knowledge of BRAC agent	27	52	8	13	193	11

In the study area the condition is improving day by day but it's not in a satisfactory level. That's why they ranked it first. Most of our rural women were illiterate or had minimum level of education. As there were insufficient GOs and NGOs, majority of them had no training exposure.

Deficiency of knowledge of BRAC agent is less important problem, because, they are well trained for rural women, and they are trained on food and nutrition for suggesting rural women.

Probable suggestions of the problems as mentioned by the respondents

Developing food nutrition on their daily food item in most low-income and farm households is not only to increase food availability but also to increase incomes of the farm household in order to increase their economic access to food and to provide the economic growth necessary to finance the educational and health services critical to improve food nutrition.

If government and non-government organizations take initiatives to involve rural women in different income generating activities, they would be able to increase their household income which will help them to purchase nutritious food materials, food preserving material etc. Awareness developed through training will also help them to increase their decision making ability regarding household food management. Training and educational facilities should be provided to the rural women regarding household food nutrition, so that they can broaden their outlook and able to take part in knowledge on household food effectively. When GOs and NGOs provide easy and low interest credit facilities to the rural households they will be able to buy different food storage materials which will help them to increase their food storage facilities. If communication facilities could be improved and health workers stay in the clinic regularly, rural women will be able to increase their sanitation facilities through consultation with health workers. From their practical view point, they set forth the following recommendations should address to overcome the aforementioned problems:

- ✓ Communication facilities should be improved
- ✓ Health workers should stay in the clinic regularly
- ✓ Training and educational facilities should be provided regarding household food nutrition.
- ✓ GOs and NGOs can help by providing different communication media for mass awareness.
- ✓ Health Department should set strict rules and regulations regarding health workers activities etc.

Relationship between the selected characteristics of the rural women and their problems

To explain the dependent variable and explanatory variables age, education, farm size, family farm size, annual family income, training received, knowledge on food and nutrition, communication media, decision making capacity in the family, cosmopolitanism, extent of need on food nutrition. The dependent variable was "problems faced by the rural women in receiving services on food and nutrition". Pearson's Product Moment Co-efficient of Correlation (r) was used to test the null hypothesis concerning the relationships between two variables. Five percent (0.05) level of probability was used as the basis for rejecting the null hypothesis. The results of correlation of co-efficient test between the explanatory and focus variables have been shown in Table 4.

Table 4 Correlation between the selected characteristics of the rural women and their problems

Selected independent variables characteristics	Correlation co-efficient (r) with 98 df	Tabulated values (r) significant at (98 df)	
		0.05	0.01
Age	-0.116		
Education	-0.081		
Family size	-0.108		
Farm size	-0.028		
Annual family income	.084		
Training received	-0.012		
Organizational participation	.142		
Communication media	-.198*		
Decision making ability	-.071	0.197	0.257
Cosmopoliteness	-.012		
Knowledge on food and nutrition	-.200*		
Extend of need	0.223*		

* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed)

Co-relation analysis indicates that communication media, knowledge on food and nutrition and extent of need had shown significant relationship with problems faced by the rural women but other variables did not show any significant relationship. While communication media and knowledge on food & nutrition shown negative relationship but extent of need shows positive relationship with problems. It also explains that rural women having high level knowledge and

Communication exposure resulted in reducing problems while rural women having high need on food and nutrition face more problems. The similar findings found in the study conducted by Halder et al., 2019. Actually, literate women know better about the importance of nutrition than the illiterate women. Educated women have interest to get information about nutrition issues. It helps individual to become rational, conscious and get useful information to increase knowledge on nutritional value. Thus, it can be said that increasing level of knowledge of the rural women may helps to minimize the problems they have. The similar interpretation may employ in case of communication media exposure as media provide the information to the people, so that they can understand the situation they faced. So, rural women those are connected with communication media will able to minimize their problems especially in receiving services on food and nutrition. Need always forces human beings to get involved in something. Thus, increases needs on food and nutrition of the rural women increase problems. The similar results and interpretation are found in the study conducted by Hasan, 2017.

4. CONCLUSION

The highest proportion (72 percent) of the respondents in the study area faced high extent of problem, while the rest 28 percent of the respondents faced medium extent of problem towards nutrition of food and none of the respondents in the study area faced low level of problem. Thus, it can be concluded that rural women living in the study with huge problems in receiving services on food and nutrition resulted in malnutrition as observed during filed work. Besides, the major problems faced by the respondents were Non-cooperation of BRAC program agent, Lack of frequent visit by the BRAC agent, Lack of frequent communication by the BRAC agent and so on. Deficiency of knowledge of BRAC agent is the last rank of problems. Therefore, it concludes here that these problems might be the obstacles in future for health improvement of the rural women. The respective authority should take initiatives to overcome those problems to ensure good services for the rural women. Moreover, communication media, knowledge on food and nutrition and extent of need had shown significant relationship with problems faced by the rural women but other variables did not show any significant relationship. Thus, it is concluded that these variables may be influenced the rural women to receive the service provided by the BRAC.

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